

A DREAM COME TRUE

Palm Beach Junior College finds a permanent home

Palm Beach Junior College, after 23 years and three temporary locations, is like the little orphan who had his dream of a permanent home come true.

The dream began in the post-boom, mid-depression days of the early 1930's when Palm Beach High School enrollment was swelled by a large group of graduates who, unable to finance a college education or to find jobs, returned to PBHS for post-graduate study.

Mr. Howell L. Watkins, then Supervising Principal, and County Superintendent Joe A. Youngblood conceived the idea of a junior college for the Palm Beaches - an institution that would give the student with scholastic ability and limited funds an opportunity for higher education. Support of civic and business groups was enlisted and an Advisory Committee was formed with representatives from various civic organizations. Mr. Watkins and University of Florida officials developed a basic two-year curriculum to meet students needs; a group of teachers with masters degrees and proven ability was asked to teach one or two extra classes without additional salary. Mr. Watkins was named Dean of the college and in October 1933 the first class was accepted. The dream had become a reality.

In June 1936 the first class of three was graduated and in September of that year Dr. John L. Leonard succeeded Mr. Youngblood as County Superintendent and President of the college. The climax to Mr. Watkins' 15 years as dean came in 1942 when PBJC became fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

World War II slowed the tempo of rapidly growing PBJC but with the sudden upsurge in enrollment at war's end, JC began "bursting at the seams."

1947-48 was a momentous year for the college. In December 1947, PBJC became the first public junior college in Florida approved by the State Board of Education for participation in the Foundation Program. Earlier in the fall the Board of Public Instruction had acquired a 21 acre section of Morrison Field from the U. S. Government following deactivation of the field. PBJC moved to its second location in February 1948. In July Dr. Leonard relinquished the Superintendency and became full time president with a home on campus.

The large hospital section was turned into administrative and classroom units, the officers' club became the student union, the officers' club became the student union, the officers' quarters were transformed into dormitories, and the swimming pool, tennis and basketball courts, gymnasium, and theater all combined to give PBJC an air of happy permanency.

This air of permanency faded with the outbreak of the Korean conflict. War meant reactivation of the field and once again the college was without a home of its own. Students and alumni were aided by local newspapers in their plea for another location but none were large enough to facilitate the needs. Then the Town of Lake Park offered its town hall as a temporary haven and in August 1951 thousands of library books, furniture and equipment were moved in. Limited space in the town hall meant cutting the enrollment to 200 or less, reducing the faculty and staff to half but, as always, the faculty took it in stride and upheld the scholastic standards and the college remained accredited.

During the next four years the morale around "the little orphan college," as it was beginning to be nicknamed by the newspapers, was boosted by the friendly spirit that pervaded its halls and the knowledge that local civic organizations, office holders, alumni, and others were still working to keep it intact.

Led by Senator Russell O. Morrow, long a staunch supporter of PBJC, the Palm Beach County delegation to the State Legislature, which included Representatives Fred O. "Bud" Dickinson and Emmett Roberts, joined educators from other junior college localities to sponsor a bill appropriating funds for development of the four public junior colleges in Florida. On the morning of May 4, 1955, the headline that blazed across the Palm Beach Post read "SOLONS APPROVE \$1,047,000 FOR JUNIOR COLLEGE." A million dollars! Could the dream be coming true?

The first temporary location of Palm Beach Junior College was on Gardenia Street in West Palm Beach in the present science building.

In 1947 the college moved to its second temporary site at Morrison Field and enjoyed several outstanding facilities.

Morrison Field was reactivated in 1951; therefore Palm Beach Junior College moved to its third and final temporary home at the city hall in the Town of Lake Park.

Among the offers for a permanent campus was a 114 acre tract near Lake Osborne proposed by the County Commission and this site was finally approved by the School Board, Advisory Committee and State Department of Education. In September 1956, the first of five modern buildings to house administration, library, lecture rooms, laboratories, student union, cafeteria, physical education and fine arts was completed and the doors were opened to the largest student body in PBJC history. President Leonard had realized his dream of a permanent campus and the little orphan college at last had a home of its very own.